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LAW FIRM LEADERS

Domestic violence damage too often family law concern

Attorney discovers there are many types of abuse; more than physical, mental and financial included

BY SARAH MANSUR
Law Bulletin staff writer

Displays of purple ribbons can be seen across the country during October — a symbol to raise awareness about domestic violence.

For Jessica Bank Interlandi, the problem of domestic violence is one she deals with every month of the year.

Interlandi is a partner at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP. She represents clients in a range of family law matters, including cases involving claims of domestic violence.

The Daily Law Bulletin spoke to Interlandi about her experience in this area, as well as the Violence Against Women Act, which created the first federal criminal law against battering.

The law, first passed in 1994, also provides funding for victim services in addition to establishing a civil remedy for women to sue their attackers.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Law Bulletin: As a family law attorney, you also represent victims of domestic violence, I understand.

Jessica Bank Interlandi: When I have mentioned [my experience representing victims of domestic violence], people are always surprised to hear that even in a practice where there are very high-net

worth clients that domestic violence is actually very prevalent ... I see a lot of emotional abuse, I see a lot of domestic abuse that takes the form of financial deprivation and exercising control over someone's finances. I see a lot of coercive control by one spouse over another.



Jessica Bank Interlandi

I also see what one thinks of traditionally as domestic violence: physical violence.

LB: What motivated you to take on this kind of work, representing domestic violence survivors?

JBI: That area is of particular interest to me because I think as someone who is a family law attorney, we are very uniquely situated to help people in that situation because we are in the family law court. And I feel like this practice area is a very good vehicle to

“Sometimes there is a misconception that domestic violence is always visible to the naked eye. Domestic violence can take a lot of different forms ... ”

allow the issue of domestic violence to be addressed whether it's with the court or with public service organizations or being on a board of a domestic violence victim advocacy organization.

As a family law attorney, we have a special duty to be advocates for

people who are in that situation.

LB: Do you think the Violence Against Women Act should be reauthorized this year?

JBI: I do think it should be reauthorized because it allows additional protection and remedies for women who have been abused ... or any woman who has been a victim of violent crime. It has provisions that impose civil remedies where the prosecution elects not to prosecute. I think that's important because sometimes in domestic violence situations it's a he said, she said and even though someone's story is believable, there is a burden of proof that has to be met that might not necessarily be met by the evidence that exists. The Violence Against Women Act allows for some additional remedies outside of the traditional criminal prosecution that we might think of.

LB: Is there anything you think people get wrong about victims of domestic violence, based on your experience?

JBI: Sometimes there is a misconception that domestic violence is always visible to the naked eye. Domestic violence can take a lot of different forms that are not necessarily readily apparent. There are sometimes people who have been the victim of emotional abuse or a significant power imbalance which is what exists for every domestic violence situation for a very long time. You can't necessarily see that on the outside ... In most cases you can't see it and simply because you can't see it or it wasn't reported for a very long time doesn't mean it didn't happen. People need to be listened to carefully and heard.

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